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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/FO AND NEA/I. NSC FOR PHEE AND VROOMAN.

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SUBJECT: HUMAM AL-HAMMUDI: ELECTION PROSPECTS AND U.S. ROLE
IN IRAQ

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR YURI KIM FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) bloc leader Humam al-Hammudi was optimistic regarding the election and believed the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) and State of Law Alliance (SLA) were in very close competition. He welcomed U.S. and UNAMI efforts, especially monitoring, to support a fair and transparent election, but pointedly noted that, since the signing of the U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement (SA), the United States no longer has a voice in Iraqi political decision making. He cautioned that opinions expressed publicly by some U.S. officials could negatively affect the U.S.-Iraqi relationship. Regarding statements by Badr Organization leader Hadi al-Amiri criticizing the concept of a national unity government, Hammudi clarified that Amiri was not calling for the exclusion of entities from the political process, but rather favored a government comprised of a political majority with a strong opposition rather than a "unity" model. End Summary.

ELECTION CAMPAIGNING IN FULL SWING

¶2. (C) In a February 24 meeting, Hammudi told PolCouns that election campaigning is now in full swing and all parties are preoccupied with reaching out to voters. He said he was very pleased with the democratic experiment in Iraq, and assessed that there would be much wider participation during this election than previously, as well as tougher competition across the board. Hammudi stated that he was campaigning all over Iraq, lending his support to the INA platform, and was finding that ISCI had more support than during the January 2009 provincial elections. He believed that election promises and speeches were not influencing voters as before, as Iraqis saw the realities on the ground and looked to vote for those who would truly improve their standard of living.

¶3. (C) Hammudi said it was in the interest of all parties to maintain a responsible attitude in campaigning, and assessed that the general election atmosphere was positive. It was important to assure the Iraqi people that elections would be conducted fairly and emphasized that it was incumbent upon "us" (likely referring to the Iraqi political leadership) to overcome attempts to undermine the election process and security. Hammudi remarked that his primary concerns moving forward into elections were maintaining security and countering efforts to cast doubt over the election results. He said he had just spoken with UNAMI Deputy SRSG Jerzy Skuratowicz and urged him to work with the United States and all political blocs to ensure that the election process would be transparent and the outcome fair. He had stressed to Skuratowicz that UNAMI must work with the Independent High

Electoral Commission (IHEC) on a daily basis to make the elections transparent. Hammudi added that he was concerned by information coming out of IHEC that 7 million extra ballot cards had been printed and 800,000 names had been added to voter lists. (Note: Other political leaders have expressed concerns regarding the alleged printing of seven million extra ballots. End Note.) PolCouns underscored U.S. desire to see a fair and transparent election process, noting the numerous steps the USG was undertaking in this effort, including by dispatching 26 monitoring teams throughout the country and funding a broad array of voter and candidate training programs.

ELECTORAL OUTLOOK

¶ 14. (C) Hammudi said that based on provincial election trends and current opinion polls, he believed the INA was ahead in all provinces except Basrah, Baghdad, and Karbala, where the INA was neck-and-neck with Maliki's SLA. (Note: Hammudi likely was referring to provinces with Shi'a-majority populations. End Note.) He acknowledged, however, that some statistics showed the INA up by 5-7 percentage points while others showed the SLA up by 5 percent. Hammudi speculated that the two Shi'a coalitions (INA and SLA) would together win 150 seats in the next parliament and as such would be able to form a government, but admitted that reaching a post-election agreement would be difficult. According to Hammudi, the key question is, "Can we reach a compromise solution that will make everyone happy?" Regarding prospects for the next government, Hammudi opined that many would not accept Maliki's continuation as PM, as he had lost

credibility by not fulfilling promises. On the other hand, Hammudi noted, it would be hard for either side to support a PM candidate who was not well known.

¶ 15. (C) PolCouns stressed that the United States does not support any particular party in the upcoming national election, but rather supports a fair and transparent election process. With regard to de-Ba'athification, she reiterated that the United States remains opposed to the Ba'ath Party, but had been concerned by the lack of transparency in the de-Ba'athification process and by reports of further de-Ba'athification at both the national and provincial level.

She encouraged Hammudi to take a leadership role in helping the Iraqi people move past the current de-Ba'athification controversy and strengthen Iraq's legal and judicial processes.

NO MORE U.S. SEAT AT THE TABLE

¶ 16. (C) Hammudi observed that before the Security Agreement was signed in late 2008, the U.S. Ambassador in Baghdad had rightfully been part of the political decision-making structure of Iraq and was accepted as "one of us." When the Ambassador made his views known, they were accepted on par with those of the Iraqi leadership. Now that the SA was in place and Iraq was fully sovereign, the United States was not an equal member of the decision-making process. He said that given the heightened sensitivities of the current electoral environment, statements and actions by U.S. officials that might have been acceptable during the pre-SA period would now negatively impact the U.S.-Iraqi relationship. PolCouns stressed that the United States had no intention of interfering in the Iraqi elections and did not want to be used as an election issue. That said, she reiterated that the United States had a fundamental interest in supporting fair and transparent political process, inclusive of the election on March 7.

CLARIFYING THE RECORD

¶ 17. (C) PolCouns questioned Hammudi regarding a statement made by Badr Organization leader Hadi al-Amiri on February 24

criticizing the concept of an "inclusive government." Hammudi clarified that Amiri was criticizing the concept of a "unity" government, not an inclusive government. He said there are two schools of thought regarding the shape of the next government: it could either be a national unity government, or a majority coalition government with a strong opposition. The current government was one of the former model and had proven itself ineffectual due to the need to achieve broad consensus. He believed that a unity government had no measures of success or failure, no delegation of responsibilities, and no clear oversight. However, Hammudi acknowledged that based on the Iraqi constitution, even a majority government would in essence be a unity government as it would require a 2/3 majority to approve the President and other top officials. He added that Amiri supported the idea of a majority government with a strong opposition, which, according to Hammudi, Iraqiyya head Ayad Allawi also favored.

Hammudi further clarified that all parties understood that it was in their interest to ensure that no one felt excluded from the government formation process. (Note: In a related conversation, MP Abbas al-Bayati told Poloff that Amiri's statement was reasonable as he was not demanding an end to Qstatement was reasonable as he was not demanding an end to quotas across the board and was not trying to marginalize Sunnis and Kurds. Bayati observed that Amiri seemed to be calling for a government coalition of only the strongest political actors from each group. End Note.)

18. (C) Comment: Fresh from stumping in the south, Hammudi appeared relaxed and confident during this meeting. While pleased with the overall election process to date, Hammudi was reluctant to wager guesses as to the election outcome and did not appear overly optimistic that Iraq's two main Shi'a blocs would be able to easily reach a compromise during government formation. He was clear on one point, though: The United States should play a strong support role in Iraqi politics, but it should not presume to play the same role in government formation after March 7, 2010 that it played after December 15, 2005. End Comment.

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